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Pathways to Peace

Justice, Reconciliation, and Peace -
reflecting Churches' Call and Witness in
times of war in Europe

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Framework – the Call and Witness strategy

The Call and Witness strategy of November 2021 urges CEC to prioritise, focus and sharpen its efforts.

It calls for increased attention to the potential of being a fellowship of European churches reflecting theologically on its nature and purpose, and it highlights the privileges of being situated in the heart of European decision making. Furthermore, the Call and Witness strategy operates with three central principles for change in CEC: capacity, agility and subsidiarity, serving as guiding principles towards a more profiled organisation.

The Pathways to Peace initiative, presented to the Governing Board for discussion and decision, is in line with the Call and Witness narrative and the guiding principles of the change process at CEC. It aims at taking advantage of CEC as a fellowship of churches, with a concerted, coordinated effort to bring in resources from its constituency while addressing the most demanding, current political issues in Europe.

It focuses on the political processes in Brussels and Strasburg and is designed to fit within CEC's current capacities, leaving grassroot activities to individual churches "on the ground", thereby applying the subsidiarity principle. Finally, it demonstrates that the Call and Witness strategy enables the organisation to respond to the current state of war on European soil through organisational agility.

The Pathways to Peace initiative reaches back to the early DNA of the organisation, aiming for European unity through work in the areas of justice, reconciliation and peace. This is a continued effort within the current proposal, strongly inspired by a shared CEC legacy, in line with the original role and purpose of CEC, continued beyond the fall of the Berlin Wall into the 1990s, now reinvigorated in the 2020s. European contemporary history demonstrates that this is an area that is constantly relevant for churches to address in a concerted and unified manner.

Finally, the Pathways to Peace initiative, with its proposed eight objectives, serves a greater purpose within CEC's mission statement, and is fundamental to the Call and Witness strategy: "to claim and safeguard space for faith as a legitimate element in a European political discourse, and to support churches in their struggle to find ways in this context". Churches will only gain space as a legitimate element and voice in a European political context if churches can demonstrate that they make a difference to the benefit of Europe and her citizens.

The Pathways to Peace initiative is designed to make that difference.

The current context

The breakout of war in Ukraine has revealed how fragile peace is. Until recently, war has been inconceivable for most of the western and northern parts of the European continent, while other parts of the continent that have experienced conflict in recent years, for instance Armenia, the Balkans, Cyprus and Northern Ireland, have been reminded of their own unreconciled wounds.

A war in the heart of Europe highlights anew the necessity of conflict prevention and peace-building, and the importance of peace education. It also manifests the role that religion plays in this particular conflict and the need for churches to exercise their mediating and diplomatic skills.

Churches in Europe have immediately reacted by re-affirming peace as an integral and indispensable element of the Christian gospel, calling on both sides for a ceasefire, addressing church leaders in both the countries involved, exercising church diplomacy, praying for peace, and providing humanitarian aid and care for the refugees.

Since February 2022, CEC has been in regular contact with Member Churches and other churches in Ukraine. CEC also addressed the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church, albeit without receiving a response. The secretariat has been following developments in Ukraine and the neighbouring countries, listening to the current experiences and realities of churches, discussing their responses to the war, hearing their hopes for the future, and bringing their voices to the European institutions.

However, at its meeting in October, the severity of the situation caused the CEC Presidency to require deeper engagement with the churches in the region and with CEC's extended network. A process of consultation and discernment was then initiated concerning priorities and effective planning that will allow for a concrete outcome. The immediate result is the current proposal for an integrated and sustainable initiative.

Peace as our Christian vocation

In an increasingly complex and wounded world, churches and individual Christians, along with other communities of living faiths and people of no faith, have come to recognise that working for peace constitutes a primary expression of our common responsibility for life in the world.

This responsibility is grounded on the essential goodness of all human beings and the whole of God's creation. Peace is inextricably related to the notion of justice and freedom that God has granted to all human beings through Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit as a gift and vocation. Peace and peace-making as a gift and calling connect theology with ethical witness and social transformation. The dynamic nature of peace does not allow for passivity and the acceptance of injustice.

Work on reconciliation and peace is not a private and individualistic pursuit. The witness to and practice of peace is public; peace witness is public theology in action. Reconciliation encompasses the restoration of relationships between God and human beings, among human beings, and with the whole created world. It entails the mending and building of relationships and requires the change and transformation of social structures.

Human rights

For over twenty years, churches within the ecumenical movement have reflected on the concept of just peace. As part of this work, churches have highlighted justice as essential to the work of reconciliation and to the safeguarding of lasting peace.

Despite the scepticism concerning the nature, basis, and enforceability of human rights, the practice of justice concurs with the respect for human rights in European democratic societies, and is perceived as a requirement for human flourishing and necessary standards of human community, and as the foundation for emancipatory politics.

Since the breakout of war in Ukraine, European societies witnessed a crisis in the use of the concepts of peace, reconciliation, justice, and truth, as both countries of the conflict have appealed to them. There is a need to redefine these concepts and create a common framework to address the ongoing hostility.

Churches can play a decisive role in creating a common language for communication and preparing for peace. In the face of hardships, churches are called to proclaim hope and trust in God. Developing a theology of hope and justice that responds to war ecumenically is part of our Christian vocation.

Prerequisites – setting the scene

In developing the Pathways to Peace initiative, a number of prerequisites have been identified in order to secure inter alia continuity, viability, ownership and compatibility with formerly agreed on plans and decisions. The fundamentals are listed and annotated below for the sake of clarity and transparency.

- **The Pathways to Peace initiative is church-based, theologically grounded, and reflects CEC’s legacy as a platform for dialogue.** The Call and Witness strategy requests that CEC base all activities on theologically reflected reasoning. CEC is church-based. This calls us to reflect theologically before acting. It also gives CEC a comparative advantage, an edge which stands out among the plethora of initiatives that are currently aimed at Ukraine from a more secular tradition.
- **The Pathways to Peace initiative is as widely as possibly a common effort by CEC Member Churches.** CEC is an organisation, but it is more than that – it is a fellowship of churches. Fellowships are tested in times of trial and crisis. Currently Europe is experiencing one of the - if not the – biggest crises since World War II. It is time for churches to show that they are part of a fellowship that can and will respond to a crisis with a common effort. To succeed, the initiative requires the attention and concrete support of Member Churches in terms of Human Resources, finance and communication.
- **The Pathways to Peace initiative should aim for compatibility with the theme and intentions of the CEC Assembly 2023.** It has been long since decided by the Assembly Planning Committee (APC) that Ukraine will have a place on the programme at the CEC 2023 Assembly. The plan is to include two hearings on the situation and developments in the country. Planning is challenged due to the volatility of the situation. However, the initiative will as a matter of course seek to integrate into these plans, assist the APC, and then take over the final planning closer to the Assembly.

- **The Pathways to Peace initiative seeks not to duplicate existing initiatives but to find its own unique role.** Ukraine is taking almost all attention from secular as well as religious actors on the relief and aid scene. Part of the initiative is to get an overview of existing initiatives and design an action plan that comprises the skills and opportunities in CEC's constituency, e.g. our ecumenical nature and legacy and our privileged position and network within the European institutions.
- **The Pathways to Peace initiative seeks external funding in so far as deemed possible and desirable.** With much attention given to Ukraine, financial resources are also made available for initiatives aiming to mitigate the conflict. There is a strong political interest from European governments and from the EU to do as much as possible to contain the crisis and seek solutions for a lasting peace. There is a growing understanding among European policy makers that religion plays a role in the war in Ukraine – also in the creation of peace. The initiative will investigate options, while always considering the desirability of strings attached to external (*in casu* non-church) funding.
- **The Pathways to Peace initiative may seek cooperation with existing initiatives - secular and faith-based – if deemed possible and desirable.** Together we achieve more – this is a fundamental understanding within the ecumenical movement. The initiative is open for cooperation with both secular and religious actors on the scene as long as the cooperation does not compromise CEC's particular and unique role as church-based and theologically grounded.
- **The Pathways to Peace initiative takes into consideration the restricted human resources of the CEC secretariat.** The CEC secretariat works with restricted human resources. The Call and Witness strategy takes this into consideration and requires a work portfolio that reflects this situation. Call and Witness, however, also operates with larger involvement from Member Churches. This is reflected in the initiative, which seeks available human resources in Member Churches. The initiative is dependent on the willingness of Member Churches capable of offering the support of temporary staff or, alternatively, offering financial support that will enable CEC to hire temporary staff.
- **The Pathways to Peace initiative will involve youth resources and youth concerns as widely as possible.** CEC is consistently concerned with ensuring that young voices are secured space on all levels of the organisation, although it has no dedicated youth desk. The Governing Board has appointed a youth advisor from its midst who maintains a strong link to several European youth organisations. Aiming at future peace in areas of conflict, we cannot and should not avoid considering the younger among us who will eventually inhabit that future. The initiative aims to engage the potential of the younger generations.
- **The Pathways to Peace initiative works with basic human rights and special attention to FoRB.** Human rights issues play a significant role in the history of CEC. In recent years, increased focus has been given to issues relating to FoRB. The initiative secures a strong element of human rights and gives attention to issues of FoRB. Both are high on the agenda of Ukraine and will be even after a peace solution has been secured. Attention to human

rights and FoRB also strongly relates to the overall agenda of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

- **The Pathways to Peace initiative aims for strategic high-level activities, not grassroots level interventions.** Subsidiarity is a guiding principle in the Call and Witness strategy. CEC is not a grassroots organisation but a fellowship of churches. Churches are locally-rooted and thus suited to do grassroots work. CEC is located at the highest political level in Europe and the initiative takes advantage of CEC's privileged position vis-à-vis the European institutions and the Council of Europe, while pointing to and demonstrating the work done by Member Churches at grassroots level.
- **The Pathways to Peace initiative aims for activity during a defined period with clear goals, and it subjects itself to evaluation.** It is impossible to say how long the war in Ukraine will continue. The initiative engages with a number of activities that will be shaped by both the current situation and, in particular, by the time to restoration and peace. The Pathways to Peace initiative is designed with agility in mind and is given a certain frame of mobility in order for it to adapt to the situation as it evolves. This should not, however, compromise an aim for clear goals that can be assessed and evaluated. This is all the more important should CEC secure financial or human resource backing from Member Churches or elsewhere.
- **Recruitment with the Pathways initiative in mind.** The recruitment of staff foreseen in the Call and Witness strategy for the Advocacy and Dialogue unit will be carried out with this initiative in mind. It will also enable CEC to focus its work long-term within the areas of justice, reconciliation and peace on a political level in Europe - beyond the immediate needs for advocacy related to Ukraine.

Groundwork – engaging the networks

Enhanced ownership is a key feature and aim of the Call and Witness strategy. A sense of ownership by and relevance to the Member Churches is crucial to a continued operational secretariat. The power of ownership equals more long-term commitment and an overall will to engage.

Hence, ownership has been critical in the build-up of the current Pathways to Peace initiative. The individual elements in the final project proposal reflect real requests and suggestions from Member Churches, inviting their involvement. At the same time, groundwork for the initiative has required in-depth knowledge of the current situation and expertise in several fields relating to public theology, church diplomacy, peacebuilding, and human rights.

The secretariat has organised five workshops from 24 October to 9 November, partly to perform a situation analysis and establish an overview of existing church-related initiatives, partly to listen to concerns from Member Churches and organisations in partnership and, finally, partly to identify needs and potential individual elements of the full initiative.

The workshops have been distributed among the following experts and stakeholders:

- Rev. Peter Ciaccio, Waldensian & Methodist Church in Italy
- Ms Christiane Ehrenguber, Chairperson, WSCF-Europe
- Dr Regina Elsner, Expert on the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS), Berlin
- Ms Spyridoula Fotinis, Vice-Chairperson, EYCE
- Ms Lydia Funck, General Secretary, Church and Peace
- Dr Tamara Grdzeldze, Associate Professor, Department of Religious Studies, Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia, former ambassador
- Ms Martha Jarvis, Reconciliation Programme Coordinator at Lambeth Palace
- His Grace Bishop Hovakim Manukyan, Armenian Apostolic Church, Diocese of the United Kingdom and Ireland, CEC GB member
- Dr Philip McDonagh, Director, Centre for Religion, Human Values, and International Relations, Dublin City University, former diplomat
- Dr Aleksandra Pistalo, Serbian Orthodox Church, CEC GB Member
- PD Dr Christine Schliesser, Director of Studies at the ecumenical Centre for Faith and Society of Fribourg University
- Ms Lea Schlenker, Evangelical Church in Germany, CEC GB Member
- Dr Pavlo Smytsnyuk, Former Director of the Ecumenical Institute in Lviv, Ukrainian Catholic University, Research Fellow at Princeton Theological Seminary
- Dr Sven Thore Kloster, Senior Advisor on Public Theology, The Bishops' Conference of the Church of Norway
- Ms Natallia Vasilevich, Moderator of 'Christian Vision' group of the Coordination Council of Belarus.

The following were invited but are not able to participate in a first round of explorations:

- Very Rev. Archimandrite Aimilianos Bogiannou, Director, Representation of the Orthodox Church to the European Institutions, Ecumenical Patriarchate
- Prof. Dr Fernando Enns, Centre for Peace Church Theology, Hamburg, Chair for (Peace-) Theology and Ethics, Free University Amsterdam
- Ms Salpy Eskidjian, Executive Director, Office of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process (RTCYPP) Under the Auspices of the Embassy of Sweden
- Rev. Dr Grzegorz Giemza, Director of the Polish Ecumenical Council
- Very Rev. Archimandrite Nektarios Ioannou, Church of Cyprus, CEC GB Member
- Rev. Dr Chad Rimmer, Program Executive for Lutheran Theology and Practice, Department of Theology, Mission and Justice, Lutheran World Federation
- Rev. Dr Sorin Selaru, Director of the Permanent Office of the Romanian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions
- Prof. Pamela Slotte, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland.

Upon approval of the proposal by the Governing Board, an extended consultation process will be launched inviting Member Churches, partner organisations, and individual experts to elaborate on the individual objectives of the initiative to clarify the needs and potential, describing the tasks in detail.

Programmatic Contents: Pathways to Peace

Below, please find the programmatic contents list of the initiative, systematised and allocated into eight objectives that are again divided into sub-objectives. The list includes collaboration with partners and is presented with a proposed timeframe.

Objective 1:

Call for a ceasefire during the period of Christmas celebrations.

Sub-objectives

1. Address the political leadership of the Russian Federation and Ukraine.
2. Organise an event in Brussels to launch the call.

Collaboration

COMECE (incl. the Vatican) and selected church leaders from CEC Member Churches (including His All-Holiness Bartholomew I and the Most Revd Justin Welby Archbishop of Canterbury).

Timeframe

November/December 2022

Objective 2:

Provide a safe space for an honest exchange between Ukrainian and Russian church leaders and representatives during the 2023 CEC General Assembly.

Sub-objectives

1. Identify moderators trained in mediation.
2. Engage Ukrainian and Russian church leaders and representatives.
3. Invite voices from the broader region depending on the content of the session(s).

Collaboration

The Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Polish Ecumenical Council, the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Slovak Republic and other regional actors.

Timeframe

December 2022 - June 2023

Objective 3:

Develop a network of church leaders and intellectuals for exchange on the preparation for peace.

Sub-objectives

1. Identify an accompanying steering group from within the CEC membership.
2. Organise informal exchanges with church and religious leaders in Ukraine with attention to intra-Orthodox dialogue in Ukraine and a long-term planning for approaching the Russian Orthodox Church.
3. Work on developing a common language on peace (in conjunction with objectives 7 and 8).

Collaboration

CEC Member Churches and partners, and religious leaders, church officials and intellectuals in Ukraine and Russia.

Timeframe

Sub-objective 1: December 2022 - January 2023

Sub-objective 2: First informal exchange: February 2023 - June 2023; second informal exchange: October 2023; further informal exchanges will depend on GB decisions in November 2023.

Objective 4:

Advocate for religious sites as a fundamental part of a rebuilt Ukraine.

Sub-objectives

1. Identify EU funding for the restoration of religious sites in Ukraine.
2. Address the destruction of religious sites from a legal and criminal law perspective.
3. Organise a campaign addressing the European institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Collaboration

COMECE, CEC Member Churches, and the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, European External Action Service (EEAS).

Timeframe

Sub-objective 1: Winter 2023

Sub-objective 2: Winter/Spring 2023

Sub-objective 3: Summer/Autumn 2023

Objective 5:

Promote the Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) of groups and individuals affected by the war.

Sub-objectives

1. Defend the right to conscientious objection to war.
2. Defend clergy (and laity) detained and suspended from ministry for their anti-war stance.
3. Organise a campaign addressing the EU institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg.

Collaboration

CEC Member Churches, Pax Christi, Object War Campaign of You Move Europe, International Fellowship of Reconciliation, human rights partners in Brussels.

Timeframe

January 2023 onwards.

Objective 6: Strengthen networking among European youth groups.
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Sub-objectives

1. Identify Ukrainian and Russian youth networks and organise regular meetings with them.
2. Organise peace mediation programmes for young adults from Russia and Ukraine.
3. Identify and invite young adults from Ukraine and Russia to the 2023 CEC General Assembly.
4. Actively engage young adults from Ukraine and Russia in the activities under objectives 7 and 8.

Collaboration

WSCF-E, EYCE, CEC Member Churches, Pro Oriente.

Timeframe

Sub-objective 1: December 2022-June 2023

Sub-objective 2: First programme in November 2023

Sub-objective 3: January 2023

Sub-objective 4: Ongoing

Objective 7: Facilitate exchange between Russian and Ukrainian citizens living in other parts of Europe.

Sub-objectives

1. Create a network of intellectuals and clergy living in diaspora.
2. Discuss peace-making from the perspective of those citizens living abroad.
3. Examine the question of collective responsibility for war and highlight the Russian voices that resist war.
4. Develop a theologically-informed understanding of reconciliation (in conjunction with objective 8).

Timeframe

Sub-objective 1: January 2023-June 2023

Sub-objective 2: Workshop September 2023

Sub-objective 3: Autumn 2023

Sub-objective 4: Ongoing

Objective 8:

Re-articulate the concept of 'Just peace' ecumenically and engage with conflicting narratives of justice and truth.

Sub-objectives

1. Examine the concept of just peace as it has been articulated within the ecumenical movement in recent decades (discuss the WCC material of the Decade to Overcome Violence, 2001-2010, and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, 2013-2022).
2. Study the use of the concepts of justice, truth and just peace in the ongoing war.
3. Investigate the concept of the 'Russian World' and its use by churches and church leaders.
4. Explore possibilities of overcoming wounded memories by studying examples of peacebuilding in other parts of the world.

Collaboration

CEC Member Churches, WCC, Church and Peace, Pro Oriente, and other CEC partners.

Timeframe

Groundwork: March 2023-June 2023

Sub-objective 1: workshop October 2023

Sub-objective 2: workshop February 2024

Sub-objective 3: workshop May 2024

Sub-objective 4: September 2024

Major conference: February 2025

Finance – a concerted effort

The full implementation of the Pathways to Peace initiative is beyond the existing CEC staff capacity and hence dependant on external support. It is natural to reach out to Member Churches willing and capable of supporting CEC by means of temporary staff or, alternatively, financial support that will enable CEC to hire temporary staff.

One envisaged scenario is a working group comprising 5 – 7 staff made available by Member Churches and Organisations in Partnership. The group would work from their home contexts with e.g. 50% of work hours dedicated to the Pathways to Peace initiative.

Additional cooperating assistance from within the European Institutions, The European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Union's diplomatic service, is an option that is currently being investigated. A first exploratory meeting took place Monday 14 November 2022, based on the [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020 - 2024](#).

The Action Plan, Section 1.3.i reads that the EEAS aims to *“support interfaith dialogues and reach out to religious and faith-based actors and assess how they can be involved in the protection and promotion*

of human rights, in delivering the sustainable development goals, and in peace making, conflict prevention, reconciliation and mediation, and find synergies with ongoing UN initiatives”.

In parallel, potential cooperation with, and support from, the European Commission’s Support Group for Ukraine is under investigation. An initial exploratory meeting took place on Tuesday 15 November 2022.